

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Marion Barry 1978 Oral History Project Second Interview with Anita Bonds Conducted on July 19, 2018 by Betty King and Richard Maulsby

Anita Bonds was Deputy Campaign Manager in Marion Barry's campaign for Mayor in 1978. At the time of this interview, she is an at-large member of the Council of the District of Columbia.

BK: Today is July 19, 2018. My name is Betty King, and I'm here with Richard Maulsby.

We are going to interview councilmember Anita Bonds, for the second time. She was interviewed once before, but we felt that she was unnecessarily modest about her accomplishments. Many of the interviewees praised Ivanhoe Donaldson's talent for strategy, but the strategy would have gotten nowhere if Anita had not built the "Barry Army." So, we want to talk about that and about how you went about it. You had been working for Marion and other candidates for many years. So you knew where a lot of the activists were.

AB: That's very true. Not only did I have a sense of some of the activists, but Marion, as a rule of thumb, he accumulated a lot of friends. There was no one anywhere, in a house, in a building, on a street that he did not stop to talk to, and that paid off. When I was in his presence, it was my job to get the name and then the telephone number. We did not have emails and all of that. That would've taken much longer. "Get your telephone number. Anita, did you get that?" And, of course, I would go the extra measure to get the address. And what I learned later that all of that is very valuable. It helped me, in later times, to be able, if I knew the first three digits of your phone number, I was able to determine what part of the city you lived in.

And then I, so if I didn't know your zip code, I could lump you together. And I became very familiar with the zip codes. So all of that was very, very valuable. And at first, I did not do a card file. I made lists. And later on, we did card files of all of these names. But the value for me was that, on a nightly basis, around 11 p.m., Mr. Barry would call, and he would say, "Let's go over those names." And he would give me a clue as to how he knew the person and what the person might be interested in doing. I'll tell you, interestingly, I was talking to him about Ella Peete, and she was Creech then, Ella Creech. She married and became Peete. But Ella Creech and Janice Davis, who I have met with him, and a couple of other women were with them.

And I said, "So then I should ask Ella the same thing?" He said, "No. No. No. No, she's not, she's different." So he knew a lot about the different personalities that he met. Many of them, I thought, he knew through the schools. Having been on the Board of Education, I'm pretty sure that he visited the schools regularly.

BK: Oh, I'm sure he did.

AB: He made contact with so many people, parents as well. So he really was touching the community. So I benefitted from that in trying to organize folks. So I had my little list by, so I'll say area code, but it's not the area code. Like I knew 832 was Northeast, Ward 5, as an example and 554 was Southwest. Those things have changed now. And every now and then, I'm thrown. I'm like, "Where is this number? What could this possibly be?" And what is it, 581 was Ward 7, Northeast/Southeast area.

BK: But through all that you credit Marion, and of course he was wonderful at vacuuming up people, and he loved wooing people, and he was so out there. He was a wonderful

politician. But it was you who put them together into ward and precinct organizations and got them all marching together and doing events.

AB: I love organizing. I love problem-solving. And that's how I approached any campaign effort. "What's the issue? What do I have to solve?" Well, if you tell me, "We have to win this community," then I have to, that's the problem. I got to figure out how to do that. I am very open to people. I, too, will talk to anyone, and I'll ask questions. And all you need to do is be responsive, and then I'm going to ask you to do something, and that helped a lot. When I worked for Channing Phillips [candidate in School Board election] and then for Clifford Alexander [candidate for DC Mayor in 1974 election], Clifford Alexander, he was a new breed, at least the city felt that way. And I had so many volunteers that were willing to go on the street and do canvassing, that every night at ten, they would come back to the headquarters, and we would do a debriefing. And we went through each of the sheets. So I learned how to do that. So when I go to Marion that was under my belt, and it was an approach that, really, I thought worked well. If you recall, we came very close to votes that then-sitting mayor, Walter Washington, had. Of course, I discovered, many years later, in talking to, he's deceased of course, Harry Thomas, Sr., that we probably won because they actually stuffed the ballots in – yes.

RM: I've never heard that.

AB: Oh, no, I know you haven't.

BK: Who stuffed the ballots?

AB: The Board of Elections' workers. And, actually, he told me that. He said, "We stuff ballots in all over the place." Remember, in those days, the trash trucks picked up the

ballot boxes from the precincts. Okay. And some of the ballots never made it to the, then the Wilson Building or District Building was the vote-count center. They never made it there to where they were to be dumped open. Didn't happen. I didn't know it, but we always felt like, at least I always felt like something was amiss.

Well, Harry, Sr., told me this one day, when I had moved into Ward 5. And I was asking him how could I get involved and what have you. By the way, I had to go to the Ward 5 Dem meetings for four years straight before they ever would let me even work on a committee. It was that tight. Politics in the city was like, if you weren't – okay. So that's what he told me.

BK: So, Harry had stuffed ballots for who?

AB: Harry worked for Washington. Walter Washington that was his person. But he's the one who told me that –

BK: And his wife [Romaine] was managing Ward 5 for Marion.

AB: No, the first time it was really Mr. Bowser. First time it was Mr. Bowser. Yeah, Mr. Bowser is who I dealt with.

BK: Is he still around?

B: He's still around. Can barely move around, but he – I mean he doesn't really – I don't think he talks now. Yeah. He's like, "Eh."

BK: I interviewed Romaine but –

AB: Yeah. No, it was Mr. Bowser. Yes. But that's who I related to was Mr. Bowser. He was my board person.

BK: So, Ward 5 was stuffing ballot boxes for Marion?

AB: No. It was at the Board of Elections where this occurred.

BK: And it was for Marion or for Walter?

AB: Walter.

BK: For Walter.

AB: These are ballots that came in. They didn't count them.

RM: This is the election with Clifford Alexander.

AB: Yeah.

BK: It wasn't '78.

AB: Oh, no, no, no, no, but I'm just giving you just, yeah, but I was just pointing out that that's what he said. So years later, when I was at the Wilson Building, the District Building, something happened, and someone talked about, "You should have seen all that old paper stuff that came out of the old desks that they had moved to the basement." I said, "I don't want to see them. I don't want to know, because this will be crazy." But I don't know that it was a lot. But it probably was something like where they were doing the tallies, paper ballots then, they probably reached the point where Walter was so far ahead that they didn't want to count anymore. Who knows? Or maybe some ballots that came in late. But he told me that.

BK: But it wasn't, it didn't happen in '78, as far as we know.

AB: Oh, no, no. It would have been '74, yeah. It would've been '74, definitely. No '78 –

BK: Be still my heart.

AB: Yeah, '78, we didn't know that we were going to win. We were trying to win. We were doing all kinds of things.

BK: Florence [Tate, press secretary in Barry's 1978 campaign for Mayor] and I knew we were going to win. We just knew it. The thing was that our people weren't going anywhere.

AB: Ivanhoe did not. Ivanhoe did not know. Yeah, if he could have, he would have stopped the proceedings, if he could have.

BK: Would've stopped the proceedings and supported Tucker?

AB: I don't know that he would have supported someone else, but I think he would have said, "Marion, this is not working. This is not working."

BK: Yeah, but it was working.

AB: Well, it didn't seem like it was working. Our work base, besides from Gertrude Stein [Democratic Club, the gay organization], our work base, our leadership base, was the ragtag. It was the leftovers, people who had not found a place within the establishment. That's who it was. In some instances, it were people who were what we would call today ultra-progressives that did not want to sign on to anything. And in the eleventh hour, they might appear and say, "Okay. Well, I'll do something for him. Give me some fliers," that kind of stuff.

BK: But Florence Tate, who was the press secretary, and I, were absolutely convinced we were going to win, because our people were, it was like a crusade, was the feeling that we had, that our people weren't going anywhere.

AB: It was a mission.

BK: And the [Sterling] Tucker and the [Walter] Washington people could be swayed. They were not going to go, walk through fire for their candidate. And Marion's people, we thought, were dedicated.

AB: Well, the people that Donaldson would have spoken with would have been the higher echelon.

BK: Right, the limousine liberals.

AB: I call them the three-piece-suiters, the ones that they're in charge, and everything is going to work, and we know. And intellectually, this, this, that, and the other, and what have you. I had to hear all that, because he and I [shared an office, and as we] sat, he faced this wall, I faced that wall, that kind of stuff. And if our chairs moved at the same time, we might smack into each other, the little runway down in the office space. And my attitude was, "Keep working. Keep people working. Keep people working." I tried to be a machine as much as possible, and it paid off.

BK: It paid off.

AB: It paid off.

BK: Let them have the three-piece-suiters, because the three-piece-suiters don't go out in the street and ring the doorbells. And they don't sit up on the third floor of the Miller Fur store [the Barry campaign headquarters] and dial the phones for six and eight hours of the day.

AB: No. No, they don't. No, not at all. And they don't get the literature out, and they don't bring the intelligence back and what have you. Yes. No.

BK: One of the things that I, Richard and I, between us, interviewed six of the people who were involved in the work of running the wards. We only lacked four and eight. And the people I interviewed, I asked, "Did you find that there was an energetic and on-the-ground kind of campaign for our opponents," and the answer was by and large, "No."

AB: No. They thought they were, well, really and truly, Sterling [Tucker] made all the assumptions. His people made all the assumptions that he was going to win. He was the heir apparent. Walter Washington, we had to force into the race, because we knew, one-on-one, Marion was not, I mean it was just really clear. Once we forced Washington in,

we thought we had a chance. But then when Polly [Shackleton, Ward 3 councilwoman] remember, and David Eaton [Pastor of All Souls Unitarian Church], and John Wilson, councilman], they did that standup, that really rattled. And, remember, those are people that Ivanhoe respected, immensely. So that was the big deal. And David's sister was helping me. That was the irony for me. I was like, "Okay. Well, I know Reverend Eaton. But I mean his sister is working with me. Okay. You do what you got to do. I'm working. I'm working." I worked to past eight o'clock.

BK: The thing that I realized when I interviewed Sterling was that his only previous campaign had been for chair of the city council, and he ran unopposed. So he'd never had a campaign.

AB: I can't say that they were elitists, but they knew government, what government that we had at that time, and they expected to be successful. There are people like Judy Jenkins, and what have you, who were lifelines in places like Ward 2. Of course, she's expired and what have you. But they were working very hard.

BK: Let's talk about one or two of the people who are no longer with us, and we never got, we tried, I tried two summers to get Marshall Brown to come and talk to me, and it never worked out. Talk about Marshall.

AB: Marshall had a background with Marion from his days on U Street and Pride [Inc., thee youth training and employment program Barry established]. He knew many of the guys. And I don't know. I sometimes thought that maybe Marshall was one of them, I'm not sure, to some extent.

BK: And he was the coordinator for Ward 1 in '78, yeah.

AB: He was Ward 1. Judy Jenkins was the coordinator in 2. She's expired.

BK: What about Susan Meehan [who also worked in Ward 2]?

AB: Susan did a little bit in the Dupont Circle area, but Judy was the one who was a regular.

And, let's see, in [Ward] 3 Marjorie Passett. Is she still around?

BK: Yes, she is, and I've interviewed her and [her husband] Barry.

AB: Wow. Give her my regards if you speak to them. I haven't seen them for years.

BK: I will. They moved out to the suburbs.

RM: But Marshall, to get back to Marshall Brown a moment, his role, in the campaign, was confined to Ward 1?

AB: Yes.

RM: He was the Ward 1 coordinator?

AB: Yes, there was a coordinator for each ward, yeah.

BK: And he was very effective?

AB: I don't remember what the numbers were, but I believe, I mean I believe the –

BK: He was certainly dedicated.

AB: I believe so, yes.

BK: And he was very close to Ivanhoe, as well, I think, wasn't he?

AB: I don't think he was close to him, then.

BK: Oh, he was later on?

RM: Later.

AB: Yeah, became much later. Yeah, when Ivanhoe was off at prison, Marshall took care of some things for him.

BK: Now Judy Jenkins and Susan Meehan did Ward 2. I've interviewed Susan. And Judy, was she the uber, the overall coordinator for the –

AB: She was the coordinator. Judy Jenkins was the coordinator.

BK: And I've interviewed Marjorie Passett. Who was in [Ward] 4?

AB: In 4?

BK: I've interviewed Ethel Delaney Lee, of course.

AB: Yeah, that was her, but it was really Bob, what was his name? He's dead. He was the first director we had that Government Services Administration, lived up off of Beach Drive, had the swimming pool in his home, where we had to, Ward 4, me, spent three days straight, including a Sunday night, deliberating over who was going to be the Ward 4 candidate. And we chose Linda. We did interviews, the whole works. And there I am at 7:10, in the morning, driving through Rock Creek Park, going to my little house, down in Southwest, because we finally finished. We stayed there. It was amazing.

BK: Linda Cropp?

AB: Linda Cropp was our choice. We chose her.

BK: But that was in '82.

AB: It may have been, but I'm just saying, he was the coordinator. I don't remember his name. But he went on to be the head of the Government Services, the one that did the construction. I think it was called GSA, then, I believe?

RM: GSA.

AB: I think it was that, before DCRA and all of that was put together.

BK: Now let's talk about Lorraine Whitlock, one of a kind.

AB: Lorraine was Ward 7.

BK: One of a kind.

AB: Yeah. She and Mrs. Chapman were the coordinators.

BK: Is Mrs. Chapman still around?

AB: I think she is. She's ninety some. She might be a hundred.

BK: Was Carrie Turner part of that group?

AB: Carrie, no. She came much later. She came later, yeah. But Carrie was helping her. I mean she was one of the precinct persons, yeah. And Carrie probably was the precinct coordinator for 110, the highest voting precinct in 7 at that time.

BK: But talk about Lorraine.

AB: Lorraine, when I first met Mrs. Whitlock, she was a former schoolteacher. And she was very mild-mannered, not so opinionated. I wondered how she took to Marion, quite honestly. And she followed what I asked her to do. She really and truly did. And I could tell you, if you do what I ask you do, I'm not going to ask you to do anything that I wouldn't do. And that means if you have a list of a hundred names, and I ask could this be done over the weekend? Can you call them, and just get a feeling for who they are and what they might do and what have you? Well, she did that.

Well, I've done that. I've spent the whole weekend in the middle of my bed with all this paper and calling folk and what have you. That's how I got to know people like Mr. Bowser. So she did that. So she began to grow in strength, learning how to do things and work with people. Then she became very much like she was going, she was the boss of him, like his mom.

BK: Of Marion.

AB: And he hated it. He hated it. And I'm like, "Well, but she's really working hard for you." Same as Ethel Delaney Lee, with her poem and all of that. They all owned him, and he hated it. I was the one that had to try to get him out of this situation. So

Ms. Whitlock had gotten so that when she had her meetings, she would have this beautiful spread all under cellophane, but you couldn't eat until Marion spoke. Well, he was always late.

BK: Of course, he was.

AB: And people were sitting there. It would be 8:15, and they're, okay. Well, my habit was for every meeting I had to convene, I did notes. So I put that stuff in there. I said, "We had to wait for the mayor. He was very late," blah, blah, blah. And she made a couple of comments about, "Well, he better not be late anymore," and blah, blah, blah.

BK: This mild-mannered lady.

AB: Yeah.

BK: She turned into a barracuda.

AB: Well, you know Marion, the biggest gossip in the world. Okay. Instead of him confronting her, like, "Lorraine, let the people eat," and so and so and so. "Well, you know, Anita told me." Oh, she hated me. "How dare" – I said, Ms. Whitlock, "I work with him. I work for him." I'll never forget that. Oh, she felt like our friendship had gone to dust. And I was like, "Oh, my goodness." But that was Lorraine. And I can see situations developing in her household that did, I mean really and truly. She told me that she had gotten so she couldn't move her husband.

BK: Baldwin.

AB: Yeah. She was getting – her son was going to come and help her. But I'm pretty sure he knew that he was just there to help. I was horrified, but I wasn't surprised.

BK: You mean when her son murdered her?

AB: Uh-huh.

BK: Yeah, it must have been dreadful. Was Baldwin still alive when it happened? He's gone now.

AB: Yeah.

BK: Oh, my God. That's terrible.

AB: Yeah. Yeah.

BK: But she was implacable. The schoolteacher came out very strongly, when she got confidence in her role.

AB: And she was just a sweet, little thing.

BK: She was pretty strong by the time I came into it. And in Ward 8, who coordinated Ward 8?

AB: I was trying to remember. It was a group of people who were originally supportive of John Ray. They did the John Ray. Remember John Ray was his, yeah, so I can't remember. I suspect it was people like O.V. Johnson and that crew, Absalom Jordan. They may know more, may remember more. TJ, she's dead, Jones, Theresa Jones. She's gone. And those are the people that I knew.

BK: Yeah, because John endorsed Marion the same day that Polly Shackleton and Lee Elder [the golfer] and David Eaton endorsed Sterling.

AB: Did you talk to any of the Gibsons or any of the Gibson family members around?

BK: Jim Gibson [strong Barry supporter, later a Deputy Mayor in Barry's first administration], you mean?

AB: Uh-huh.

BK: Jim has Alzheimer's. I'd set up an appointment with him, and then his daughter called me. So I tried to talk to him. But I don't think either of the other campaigns had the kind of reach in terms of the numbers.

AB: They did not have any organization, I don't think.

BK: No, I don't think so.

AB: I got the impression, from years later, talking to some of the Sterling [Tucker] people, that they were a lot of important people, the who's who, who you want to know, always been involved, but they didn't organize themselves. They just said, "We're going to vote for him." And they didn't check to see if others were going to vote for him. And they didn't count their numbers. We were counting. I had learned that in a precinct, it's nothing but numbers. You like people, you talk to people, but you become a number. So that's what we did.

BK: There are a lot of people who, I mean all the people who fall into that "we're so grand and important" category, but there are a lot of other people, below that level, who won't vote for you unless you ask them.

AB: That's correct. That's correct. We asked a lot of people. We ran an organization where we had the voters –

BK: That was asking, constantly asking.

AB: That's right. We had the voters' list that little label list that you were pulling. We had that list, and they had to find phone numbers if they could, or they had to walk the precincts. I remember it being very difficult to get the Board of Elections to give me the list printed the way I needed it. I came up with this idea that in order to walk the blocks, I got to have it in block order, and trying to get them to understand what that was. And

that's when I discovered over on Massachusetts, near North Capitol, remember, we had the SHARE Center?

BK: Oh, yes, the [DC government] computer.

AB: Yes. Well, I spent many an evening there working with the guy to do, Mr. Yates. And Mr. Yates, even to this day, he is around. He sent me love the other day, by way of my daughter, saying, "Let her know I'm still here, and I'm still voting for her." But, man, they had a hard time getting that program to work. Because I remember getting boxes and boxes of printouts, remember? They had to take care of them all.

BK: Oh, yes.

AB: So, we really did that.

BK: And then none of them had phone numbers.

AB: None. None.

BK: Do they print them with phone numbers these days?

AB: Oh, now you can get it any way you want it, all computerized. Yeah, it's really good. You can get it on a little disk. You can put it in your – yeah.

BK: Now there were two other people who were down in, or three other people who were down in the basement with you and Ivanhoe, Kay McGrath, whom I've interviewed, and Jan Eichhorn and Phil Ogilvie.

AB: Yeah.

BK: Were they under your supervision or Ivanhoe's, or who did the –

AB: Phil and Jan were, yes. Kay, I thought she was upstairs some of the time.

BK: No.

AB: Well, she wasn't always down in the hall.

BK: No, she wasn't there every day.

AB: Yeah.

BK: She was doing –

AB: She picked up his laundry. I remember her fussing about having to pick up Marion's laundry.

RM: A “#me-too moment.”

AB: Yeah.

RM: Well, I do remember Kay coming, there was some event we did in the gay and lesbian community for business people. Business people in the community were invited. And she came along staffing Marion. It was like she was, her specialty was business or something. I mean that's my memory.

BK: But they were doing issue papers, right?

AB: Yes. Initially, yes, they were doing that, yeah. I remember that, yeah.

BK: And was Phil was doing opposition research on the other candidates?

AB: No, not really. What he was doing is trying to put the data file together. And he and Ivanhoe were clashing on a regular basis, because Phil was pretty meticulous and analytical. And Ivanhoe just wanted to have the data to look at, so he could do his own analysis.

RM: There is one incident involving Phil Ogilvie that I remember very well. Do you remember that? Could you speak to that? I think it was when the, he represented the campaign when they were picking what position the candidates would be on the ballot.

AB: If I wasn't there, I would not have known about it, yeah.

RM: Well, a candidate hit him over the head with a chair.

BK: That's right. And who was it?

AB: It was somebody who was one of those minor candidates.

BK: Yeah, he was seriously injured.

AB: Took a blow for the campaign.

BK: Yes, that is true.

AB: I didn't know about that.

BK: But they were both very influential in Ward 6 as well, of course. Both Jan and Phil lived in Ward 6 and were very much involved in the community there.

AB: Well, Jan had a lot of friends that were Sterling people. Jan had been very active on the Hill for many years. So she naturally knew, and having worked in Congress, she naturally knew some of the players. So she was very helpful in that regard.

BK: Oh, she was a big noise in the Home Rule, leading up to the Home Rule.

AB: She definitely was, yeah, definitely was.

BK: Very much involved in that. Are there other people that we haven't talked about? What was your relationship with Ivanhoe?

AB: I thought it was okay. I didn't get into his personality per se. We had a good working relationship. I thought that he was a nice, strong suit or match for Marion.

BK: Yeah, he was.

AB: I did feel that. And I encouraged, once they had their little falling out, I encouraged Marion to talk to him. "You got to do this."

BK: Falling out?

RM: During the campaign itself?

AB: Uh-huh.

BK: During the campaign, they had a falling out?

AB: Oh, yeah.

BK: Tell me about it.

AB: Oh, yeah. We had our Monday-morning meeting, at 8 o'clock, at then the Washington Hotel, now The W, I think it is. And we did breakfast. And there was this argument that pursued. Donaldson always would take it to the max. Let's put it that way. And this time, Marion didn't just sit there. He fought back.

BK: What was the subject?

AB: I have to think, I mean, really, pull that file card from the deep recesses of the brain. (Laughter.) But Ivanhoe picked up his little grip and walked away. And I was sitting there. And then Marion just stared into space. And I said, "Oh, this is serious." And then he finally talked after maybe five minutes or so. And he said something like, "I'm tired of this shit." I said, "Well, but you know you need him. You know you really need him." And he didn't say anything. I said, "Would you please just give him a call?" He said, "Anita, I'm tired of this. I'm tired of this. I'm tired of this." I said, "I understand." I said, "But could you please call him, just call him, just call him and see? He feels bad, too. I know he does." I mean I'm trying to bring the wedding back.

BK: Making it up as you go along.

AB: I was. I was. I was. Because I knew that Donaldson was serious. He always said that he was the vinegar, and I was the honey. And I said, "Well, you get more flies with honey." He says, "I know. Just go on. Go on. I know what you're going to say." He was like, "Can you get this done? Can you do that? Can you tell them to do this?" I was like, "Sure, I can." He said, "I know you're going to be nice about it." And I'm like, "Well,

Ivanhoe, that's how you get people to do things." And he said, "Ah." But, no, I didn't really feel that there was any tension. Maybe there was that I wasn't aware of. I'm sure I drove him crazy because I didn't have a similar personality, but I got my work done, and was protective of him, too. I felt that it was a good mix.

BK: Did Marion make the call to him?

AB: He did, because next week, he was back. And Ivanhoe actually called me that afternoon, and he was still mad.

RM: Do you remember what part of the campaign this was?

AB: This was early.

RM: Early on?

AB: I think maybe within the first two months, I believe, yeah. Trying to remember the weather. That gives a clue.

BK: The first office was down there over the Blue Plate Special Diner or whatever. Remember, on 13th Street?

AB: Well, but that was a different office.

BK: Then we moved to the Miller Fur Store.

AB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I remember, too, Marion's office, when we did his at-large council race. That was on 14th Street, where near the corner of 14th and probably I Street or New York Avenue. It's a big building there now. And it had the office. We were on the second floor. And it had this big glass window. And I was the scheduler. I was to make him make phone calls. That man, "Oh, hey."

BK: He'd look out the window. He did that.

AB: All the time. All the time. Oh, my goodness. It was excruciating. Ivanhoe was like, “Why can’t you get him?” I said, “Because he sees people. What should I do? Should I put a curtain up? He sees people.” I personally thought that was the value of him. The phone calls were to get money, I’m sure, familiarity, calling all the folk that were important in the business community, other kind of civic leaders. But he was seeing people and talking to them, and they just loved that. And then more and more people started just coming by and coming in, because they knew he was receptive to them.

RM: I think the one key person we wanted to ask you about is Florence Tate. Your take on Florence Tate? How long did you know her and your relationship with her in your contribution?

AB: I did not know her very long. She had always said that she had history with Ivanhoe during the civil rights movement.

BK: SNCC. [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee]

AB: Yeah. Yeah, she said she had history with them. Well, she didn’t say SNCC. She just said she had known him through the movement. I think she knew of Marion, but I don’t think she particularly worked with him. Many of the people that were brought together, I always felt that they were Ivanhoe’s folk that he knew, and he was trying to bring that to the table. And that’s what he brought to Marion.

RM: Talk about what Florence’s role was in the campaign.

AB: I guess Florence might have been doing media.

BK: She was press secretary.

AB: Yeah, I think she might have been doing media. I’m trying to remember if we, every now and then, I heard some conversation about getting a statement together. It was pretty

hard not to hear when you're sitting across from each other, but I was really busy trying to get my wards going and my precincts going and targeting them, based on this old data and going back to Phil [Ogilvie] and saying, "Phil, can you check this?" And it'd take so long. Oh, my God, take so long. But anyway, we got through it.

BK: No. You really built the army that did it.

AB: I absolutely adored him

BK: Phil Ogilvie?

AB: Uh-huh.

BK: Oh, yeah, he was one of my best friends.

AB: And Donaldson, I always felt like he would pick on him. And I always felt like it's just not justified. But then I always remember, "You're the honey. He's the vinegar."

RM: There's a pattern here that emerges in terms of your role in the campaign.

AB: Yeah. Yeah.

RM: So, you tried to smooth the waters.

AB: Yeah. I did do a lot of that. Virginia could talk to me. Almost anyone could talk to me. And that would drive Donaldson crazy that I would be willing to hear their stories. Plus, remember, I was the artist. I was the one who did the posters, the signs. And I would drive him crazy, because I changed this little piece over here. "Anita, when are you going to be done with it?" I actually went to the printer and helped the printer do the signs.

BK: The black-and-white signs, because we couldn't afford a four color, remember?

AB: I do.

BK: First campaign, black-and-white signs. Yeah. And then the second campaign, David Abramson [PR specialist] had all those cockamamie signs, in tiny print, talked about his record in housing and his record –

AB: And people loved those.

BK: Did they?

AB: Those colors. Every issue had a color. They loved it. “No, I need the red one.” I said, “Well, you don’t even have trees over there. Why are you doing that? You only have concrete. Give me my sign. I want all these signs.” It was amazing. So people were coming in for the very specific signs. So they loved it.

RM: I have a couple things I’d like to go back to. First of all, you suggested that, and the word you used was we made Walter Washington run.

AB: Yeah.

RM: I mean, obviously, you’re saying it was important in the campaign to have a three-person race. But was there, in fact, an active effort, somehow through a third party, to make sure that he did run? Was he actually considering not running for what would have been a third term?

AB: He was not running. He definitely was not running. And, yes, there were some efforts to encourage him that –

BK: Describe those efforts. What did he do?

AB: Well, it wasn’t me. It was a few others.

RM: Mutual kind of friend thing or something?

AB: Uh-huh. Yeah. It was people like those that were citizens in the community and that had longstanding, trying to convince them that Walter did not want to let Sterling and these

young Turks just run amuck, that he would not have any legacy if he weren't careful.

And Harry Thomas, Sr., was one of those persons who was helping to carry that message.

RM: You mentioned there was at some point where apparently Ivanhoe was discouraged to the point that he might have thought of counseling Marion to withdraw from the race.

AB: I don't know that he would have, I think he considered it, but I don't know if he actually would have said that to Marion. But he was thinking that we were not going to be successful. I can tell you that.

M: And what did you think?

AB: I thought we were going to win. I was working to win. I mean I was like, that's very similar to the second time. Second time, the poll data said that Marion was at 23, 26 percent.

RM: Nineteen eighty-two, you're talking about now?

AB: Yeah. And Donaldson said, "We can't win."

BK: And where was Patricia Roberts Harris [Barry's opponent in the 1982 mayor's race] at, at that point?

AB: She probably was higher, but it was, and there were maybe a couple of other names in that poll, too. I'm trying to remember.

BK: And there were a bunch of undecideds, probably.

AB: I think I kept a copy of it for a long time, but then it got water-damaged and what have you, the little black folder and everything. But I don't remember exactly. I think David Eaton might have been in one; I think he may have been in one of the polls. But the whole thing was –

BK: You got to listen to or read Max Berry's report on that aborted, the "Saturday Night Massacre," the aborted meeting with David Eaton and so forth. You've got to go online and listen to that, because Ivanhoe was dead set, according to Max, was dead set against Marion going to that meeting.

RM: What do you remember about that meeting?

AB: Ivanhoe and Marion frequently did not agree. I think if Marion had strong friendships, relationships otherwise in the community, he would have accepted that over some of the opportunities to do things with Donaldson. I think he admired him, and he depended on him, but I think he felt that Donaldson felt that Marion only had him, and that he was the answer. That's just my impression. I don't know what other people have told you, but that was sometimes my impression.

RM: What do you do on Election Day?

AB: On Election Day, well, firstly, the routine, everyone had their dimes, and they had to call in. And I had to make sure that that was done. I had to first make the calls, "Make sure you get up in the morning." That's the first thing. So that's what I did. Of course, I got into the office and began to receive the calls from the morning ballots, first, to make sure that every precinct was covered. And Marshall [Brown] was very good about that. He did what he was supposed to do. I remember that, especially, he was the first one that called in. Trying to remember who called in from, it wasn't Mrs. Whitlock who called in, but maybe her husband called in. It was a male who called in.

BK: Well, at some point in the afternoon, I was downstairs taking the phone calls and giving them to Doug Patton who was –

AB: So, he could say he was there.

RM: So, based on those calls you were receiving in the field, were they making you feel increasingly confident?

AB: Well, they made me feel that we needed to work a little harder. We had some precincts that were not covered. And I was trying to get people to get people to go to those locations. And I was worried about that. And we were, we pretty much covered, but then things, in my opinion, got a little wild in the sense that people were not calling, and I was getting worried. "How do I reach them?" We didn't have cellphones.

BK: No, no cellphones.

AB: So, if you don't call me, I will not know. And I was wanting to know whether, in my head, "Do I need to go out there?" But then what can you do? You're one person. And then finally the calls were coming in. But I didn't, I felt that we were doing well in [Ward] 3. We were doing well in [Ward] 4. I didn't know what we were going to do in 7. And I never had confidence in 8.

BK: No. No. Nobody had.

AB: I never had confidence in 8.

BK: That was Walter Washington territory.

AB: Yeah. That was people that we had kind of co-opted because we cut the deal with John Ray, and they were never really "Barry-ites" as far as I was concerned.

RM: So basically, you spent Election Day hunkered down in your office, that day.

AB: Yeah, best I can remember, yeah, best I can remember.

RM: You did vote.

AB: I went to vote at, let me see, it was one campaign where I went to vote first thing in the morning. I don't remember when I voted, but I know that I did. I'm always in a panic. I

like to vote near the end. In later years, I know that I voted. But I may have voted earlier.

RM: So, the polls close, and then you went to the campaign hotel.

BK: Harambee House.

AB: Yeah, I remember going there.

RM: What are your memories from that night and when the –

AB: Well, first John called me.

RM: John?

AB: Gibson.

RM: John Gibson, okay.

AB: He called to tell me that, “Baby, he was ahead. He was ahead now.” I said, “Oh, really?” I said, “You sure?” He said, “I’m sure. I’m sure.”

RM: Again, who is John Gibson, again?

AB: He was inside the Board of Elections, and they had just finished counting the two o’clock boxes, but he could not call until 8:03 or 8:02 or whatever it was. So he called to tell me that. And I’m busy on the phone, trying to make sure that the precincts are closed down. I will never forget that. And I was like, “You sure? You sure?” And I said, “Okay. Hold on.” I mean I’m doing my thing.

BK: And you’ve got to make sure, but see them get on the truck, so that you know that they’re –

AB: That’s right. That is a very good point. We had to make sure that we saw those ballot boxes moving, from the precinct, hopefully en route as we thought, to the Board of Elections. So it was a good five, six minutes before I realized what he had said. And

then I turned to Ivanhoe, I said, "Ivanhoe, John just called. He said we're leading." And then I'm back on the phones. So Ivanhoe is like, "What?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Oh, okay." Then he began to be the man.

RM: And I think, is it true, it's generally been a rule of thumb in D.C. elections that who leads, who's leading when those first ballots are counted, and to explain for people who might be listening to this someday, at two o'clock, they go around and collect all the ballots that had been –

BK: The morning boxes.

RM: The morning boxes, as they're called. So those are counted. But historically, in almost all elections, the candidate that's ahead –

AB: Oh, yes, I would say yes. But now, in modern times, it's done a little differently, with the balloting. They don't take a midday tally per se, because everything is done electronically, and your vote goes in once it goes in. So they know how many have voted at each of those polling stations.

BK: But I think that we knew, that they announced the morning ballots when they counted them, because, or maybe it's just that, because I remember –

AB: They release the information only, well, those who are inside, you cannot communicate with the outside world until eight o'clock. That was the deal. And this was just those morning ballots.

BK: So, when people called around and said, "We've got to pull our vote from this ward or this precinct," it was because people were analyzing where the vote was coming in.

AB: Yeah.

BK: It wasn't anything to do with counting the ballots.

AB: No. We were doing, what John was telling me is that, “We’re doing well in [Ward] 3,” because we had thought we would do well in 3. Because we had worked 3 to death, as you well know.

RM: And *the Washington Post* endorsement, obviously.

AB: Yeah. And we had three meet-and-greets in a evening. First one started at six, next one at 7:15, next one 8:30. And there were crowds of people. I knew we were going to win 3.

BK: Oh, yeah. There was no question about that.

AB: I mean it was clear.

BK: He started working on 3 in 1976, when he was running for reelection. He did a lot of events in Ward 3. And he made no, he was unblushing about, hinting strongly that he wanted them to reelect him to the council, but that he was planning to be mayor. So he started building two years in advance in Ward 3.

RM: Did you have ever any doubt that he was going to run for mayor from the time you –

AB: No.

RM: First of all, can we just step back?

AB: I got an opportunity to work at the White House. They called. I did not know it. They called. Donaldson knew it. And Marion told them, “You tell them that she doesn’t have any time. She’s going to be working for the mayor,” honest to God. Yeah, before ’78.

RM: So that’s ’77.

AB: Yeah, it was in ’74. [Anita must have been mistaken here; it’s unlikely the Republicans who held the White House in 1974 would have recruited her.]

BK: So, you had a job offer from the White House?

AB: Yes. Yes.

BK: And they never told you? The sons of bitches. (Laughter.)

AB: Never told me. And then they told me after he was elected mayor, they told me, honestly. The first inkling of any trouble with Marion, Ron Brown called me. He said, “Baby, you ain’t got to stay there. You come on over here with me.” And I was so mad that he would call me like that. And it was like a turncoat thing. “Come on.”

BK: So, Ron called you also, before, in ’78, before the –

AB: No. No. No. He called me in, I guess, about 1984.

RM: When did you first meet Marion Barry?

AB: I met him on, it was a meeting that [DC’s delegate to the US House of Representatives] Walter Fauntroy had organized. And I was one of the people who had worked for Walter Fauntroy. I worked for Channing Phillips. And when Channing didn’t win –

RM: What was Channing running for?

AB: Delegate.

BK: He was running for the non-voting delegate against Walter [Fauntroy] the first time.

AB: Walter was the nominee. So then Walter wanted me to come and help, because I had organized Ward 2, and I went to doors where people came to the door almost nude. I didn’t know that that wasn’t what would happen. I was a young thing. “I’m here to leave you some literature. I want you to read it.” Here I am from Berkeley, so I’m like, “Okay.” Man standing there in his drawers looking like this. I went to all of those tenement houses down at Buzzard’s Point. They were really rows of – yeah.

RM: So, this is ’71. So that’s your first citywide campaign you worked in for Channing Phillips. So in ’71, that’s when you met Marion?

AB: No. Marion, no, it wasn't –

BK: It was '68.

RM: No. No. No.

AB: No, it was –

RM: Nineteen seventy-one was when the –

AB: Yeah, we did that, yeah.

RM: Because that's really when I started is when [Gay activist Frank] Kameny ran, in '71.

AB: What happened, when I worked for, I worked for Walter. And when he was running for reelection somewhere in that time, Walter Fauntroy. He said that Marion Barry was running for something. Anyway, he asked me, they sent me to the campaign office, sent me to meet Marion Barry. And I remember going home telling my husband, I said, "Well, I met that Marion Barry." He says, "Well, how did it go?" I said, "Well, he had these green coveralls on and stuff." I said, "I don't know." I said, "He could pick up trash, I guess." And that was it. That was it.

BK: That was when he was in the Pride uniform.

AB: Yes, he was. He was in the Pride. And I had no reference to anything. Remember, I'm from Southwest. And here I am up here around U Street or somewhere, one of these immense churches or something, when I meet him, maybe Walter's church even, probably.

RM: When did you come to Washington, D.C.?

AB: Oh, I've been here since I was five years old.

RM: But you were not born here.

AB: No, I was not born here. Yeah, since I was five.

RM: A long time.

BK: Those were great days. They were great days. Thank you very much for agreeing to be re-interviewed. When I read your interview, I just felt that there were things that had been left out, and that your importance to the campaign wasn't properly recognized.

AB: Yeah. Well, I didn't see so much significance when I was doing it. I was just really doing my job, and I was determined to try and win. So that's how I was approaching it. But there are people who are saying, "You got to understand the history that you had with Barry is very important, as it is for anyone who had" – I mean back in the day is back in the day. And so many people, in community even today, I mean they still adore the man. They still adore him.

BK: And when they talk about "the mayor," there's only one "the mayor." That's Marion.

AB: That's true.

BK: Then the others have surnames after mayor.

AB: Yeah. One of my volunteers came by, my campaign volunteer was by earlier today. And he was talking about how he felt very strongly that I was the right person to care about people and blah, blah, blah and influenced so and so. And I said, "Well," I said, "I must tell you, I guess more than anything else, I learned a lot from that campaign when I worked for Marion Barry." He was like, "Oh, Marion Barry." It was like I had said, "Eureka." Oh, wow, it was amazing.

BK: The daytime doorman, in this building, had a summer job through Marion Barry's Summer Youth Employment Program. And when he came into my apartment and saw the pictures of Marion down the hall, oh, every time he sees me, he talks about how wonderful Marion –

AB: Yeah, he let me come up here. I said, “I need to go eighteen,” and he says, “Go.”

RM: Well, I think I’ve told you this story, but the last person I hired, when I was, my job in the federal government, she was originally here. She said, “Oh, my first job was in Marion Barry’s summer job program.” So it’s amazing. But I think one of the reasons we decided to do this oral-history project, I mean it helped us all remember what that special time was about. I mean if somebody like you, and you really, here you are in 2018. You go way back so far, and you’re still a major player in the government and the politics of the city, chair of the party. Someday, if you decide to write your –

AB: I should.

RM: My suggestion is do get a good ghostwriter. I think Marion’s memoirs suffer from the fact that he didn’t have somebody that was strong enough.

AB: That last book was, I couldn’t even believe it.

BK: I couldn’t finish it.

RM: Anyway, the point is –

AB: You have to skip around, and it was horrible just skipping around.

RM: But this provides a resource for somebody like you, I mean if you ever decide to do that, while you can’t find Richard Maulsby or Betty King, oh, my goodness. There they are. You can get the transcript. To me, that’s a great value. And, hopefully, going forward, there will be others.

AB: I want to do a book, but I want to do it, there are many things that happened. There are many things that he said to me didn’t have much of a significance to me then. He was just talking. But security always said, “He treats you like you’re his little sister. You’re the only one I know he’ll just say anything to.” I said, “Well, I mean” – he’d tell me all

about his relationship with his wife, I mean all that. But he would have to say something

—

BK: You learn to listen to that strictly —

AB: Yeah, probably, but I'd listen, listen, listen. And he would be busy speaking and talking to others at a table. And if the check came, I could sign "Marion Barry," and he didn't have a problem, because he knew I was not trying to cheat him. I was just, but I tell you, he is someone that everyone will remember, in this community. And that statue is gorgeous. It's absolutely gorgeous, down at the Wilson Building.

BK: I'll have to go down and see it. I haven't seen it.

AB: I don't know that Cora [Masters Barry, Marion's 3rd wife] did all that she wanted to with him, but he never made me feel that he would actually marry her.

BK: I think we should turn this off. (Laughter.)

[End of interview]